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ABSTRACT

A study of students' and teachers' attitudes toward cheating in the classroom of English as a second language (ESL) compared responses of five groups to a questionnaire concerning the use of crib notes, copying from another student's test, and allowing or refusing to allow another student to copy in hypothetical test situations. The comparison groups were: (1) 44 native United States undergraduates, (2) 21 Middle Eastern Arabic speakers enrolled in ESL classes, (3) 47 South American Spanish speakers enrolled in ESL, (4) 39 adult Cubans being held in an immigrant detention facility, and (5) 17 ESL teachers, all but 2 of whom were native to the United States. Overall, the results suggest that all saw cheating behavior as essentially wrong and immoral, and that of the five groups, the Spanish-speaking ESL students were the least conservative in their attitudes toward the kind of cheating behavior discussed. The other Spanish-speaking groups also appeared to be consistently less conservative than the other three groups when the groups are rank-ordered. Teacher perceptions of Spanish-speakers as more casual about cheating than others were confirmed, and perceptions of Arabic-speakers as casual about cheating were not confirmed. In written comments, many respondents spoke of the person cheating rather than the act, and the Arabic-speakers characterized both knowledge and honesty as property. It is concluded that the study does not accurately measure moral values as intended, but reflects some problems of measuring culturally-influenced behavior. (MSE)

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ATTITUDES TOWARD CHEATING BEHAVIOR IN THE ESL CLASSROOM

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The classic study of Hartshorne and May (1928) showed that children who could both describe and espouse "right" behaviors in hypothetical situations nevertheless frequently engaged in "wrong" behaviors in real situations. Since that study, a large body of research has confirmed the situation-specific nature of classroom cheating and other morally-relevant behavior (e.g., helping), and has established that a large proportion of students cheat more or less as a function of situational variation. Zastrow (1970), for example, reported that 40% of a group of graduate students reported having cheated on college tests, and also that 42 of the 45 subjects cheated in the experiment reported. Further, no one who had claimed never to have cheated on tests failed to cheat on the experimental task. Also, Baird (1980) reported that 75% of his 200 subjects self-reported that they had cheated in college.

The majority of research on classroom cheating behavior defines cheating as changing answers, using crib notes or other personal aids, and giving or receiving help on examinations. Uhlig and Howes (1967), however, reported confusion among students and professors regarding exactly what constitutes cheating, with students reporting the more conservative attitudes toward cheating. Members of different cultures apparently manifest more dramatic differences of opinion and behavior, not simply because of differences in role definition for student and teacher, but also because of more fundamental differences in embedded values of their respective cultures. In this regard Burton (1976) wrote: "Within the competitive Anglo-American culture, letting another copy one's answers is cheating; but in Mexican and other cultures . . . [it] would simply be required altruism" (p. 196).

The identification of cultural value differences is of more than merely theoretical interest. Large numbers of nonnative students participate in courses in English as a Second Language (ESL) offered by postsecondary institutions in the United States. While the primary task of ESL teachers is obvious and explicit, an implicit function of ESL teachers is to facilitate the socialization of nonnative students into that academic culture which itself is embedded in the dominant culture of the United States. When ESL teachers encounter behaviors reflecting cultural value differences which they do not recognize, their most likely tendency is to judge those behaviors—and to characterize the students who engage in them—in terms of their own cultural value system. It is not surprising, then, that many ESL teachers have reported that nonnative students are less moral than native students, based on the teachers' perception that such students cheat more than do natives, and that when confronted about cheating behavior they appear to be less remorseful (see, e.g., Hankins, 1977).

The purpose of this study was to investigate two questions: (1) Are nonnative ESL students less "moral" than native students? and (2) to what extent may cultural factors influence both the behavior and attitudes of nonnative students, and our interpretations of their behavior and attitudes? We hypothesized that significant differences in attitude toward cheating would be found among the several groups involved in the study, and anticipated that the findings would help to provide a basis for more accurate description of the challenge of intercultural encounter in the ESL classroom.

Methods

Sample

The sample consisted of 168 persons in all, in groups as follows: (1) 44 native United States undergraduates; (2) 21 Middle Eastern Arabic speakers enrolled in ESL

classes; (3) 47 South American Spanish speakers, also ESL students; (4) 39 adult Cubans being held in an immigrant detention facility in the Atlanta area; and (5) 17 ESL teachers, all but 2 of whom were native to the United States. Table 1 shows the average age for each group, the average duration of United States residence for the nonnative groups, and the sex distribution for each group. (While within-group sex distribution is noted, no statistical analyses by sex were conducted since for our purposes only gross cultural factors were of concern.)

Table 1. Sample Characteristics

Group	Total N (M,F)	Average Age	Average Residence[1]
South American Spanish-speaking ESL Students	47 (20, 27)	24.5	7.6
Middle Eastern Arabic-speaking ESL Students	21 (19, 2)	27.6	20.5
Cuban detainees (U.S. Detention Facility, Atlanta)	39 (39, 0)	29.6	29.6
United States Undergraduate Students	44 (8, 36)	24.0	
ESL Teachers	17 (5, 12)	38.3	

1. Length of residence is given in months.

Procedure

A questionnaire was developed for the purpose of eliciting self-reports of attitudes toward using crib notes, copying from another's test, and allowing or refusing to allow another person to copy, in hypothetical test situations. Item stems did not refer to specific situational characteristics that might have confounded responses (e.g., pressure for grades, risk of discovery, or importance of test performance). Given a situation involving one of the listed behaviors, subjects were asked to indicate their judgment of the person's morality, loyalty, friendliness, etc., by choosing one of six categories printed on a Likert-type scale with verbal descriptors only. The prototype questionnaire was developed in English, then translated into Spanish and Arabic, back-translated, and retranslated after editing. The names used in the situations were changed for each version (John, Steven, and Fred for the English version; Juan, Pedro, and Fernando for the Spanish version; and Youssef, Ahmed, and Sami for the Arabic version). The questionnaires also included two items in a multiple-choice format which were designed to allow assessment of level of moral reasoning in terms of Kohlberg's cognitive-developmental stage theory (one item referred to using cribnotes, the other to bank robbery). Subjects were invited (but not requested) to add written comments after each item. All responses were anonymous, and questionnaires were administered in groups with institutional authority figures absent. Following administration, randomly selected members of each group were interviewed informally. Questionnaire responses were analyzed using one-way analysis of variance with post-hoc t-tests of all possible pairings of groups (BMDP.P1V).

Results and Discussion

In this section the results of statistical tests will be described briefly, followed by discussion of subjects' unstructured responses. Based on our analysis of the

unstructured responses and on the results of the informal interviews, we shall then argue that the statistical results reported are of questionable value. This argument will be based first on the apparent fact of cultural differences that affect the value judgments involved, and second on the possibility of a response bias of nonnative individuals when they are confronted with attitudinal inquiries by members of their second-language culture.

A summary of significant intergroup differences for each item (except the Kohlberg-stage items) is presented in Table 2. The overall F was nonsignificant for the cribnote items and for "copying is (right/wrong)." For "copying is (moral/immoral)," $F = 3.54$ ($p < .01$), and post-hoc comparisons showed the Spanish-speaking ESL students to be significantly less conservative than both the Cuban group ($t = 3.5$, $p < .001$) and the Arabic-speaking ESL students ($t = 2.37$, $p < .02$). The Spanish-speaking ESL students were again significantly less conservative on the "letting someone copy is (moral/immoral)" item, with Arabic-speaking ESL students responding in the most conservative direction ($t_{[Spanish-Arabic]} = 3.65$, $p < .001$) and the native-student and Cuban groups responding only slightly less conservatively ($t_{[Spanish-American]} = 2.53$, $p < .02$; $t_{[Spanish-Cuban]} = 2.25$, $p < .03$).

The item asking for attitudes about refusing to allow someone to copy showed perhaps the most interesting results. The overall F for responses to the "moral/immoral" stimulus was nonsignificant, with all groups clustering tightly at the "moral" end of the scale. For the "disloyal/loyal" stimulus the overall F also failed to reach significance, although two of the comparisons approached significance. The Arabic-speaking and Cuban groups tended to see "refusing to allow copying" aas disloyal (respective means were 5.26 and 5.11, where an individual "disloyal" response was coded as 6), while the ESL teachers tended to evaluate such refusal as somewhat less disloyal

Table 2. Summary of Significant Intergroup Differences: Responses to "Cheating" Situations

Situation	Stimulus Continuum	Differences[1]		p^2
A. Using cribnotes	Right Wrong	none		
	Moral Immoral	none		
B. Copying	Right Wrong	none		
	Moral Immoral	Spanish	Cuban	.001
		Spanish	Arabic	.02
C. Letting copy	Right Wrong	none		
	Moral Immoral	Spanish	Arabic	.001
		Spanish	American	.02
		Spanish	Cuban	.03
D. Refusing to let copy	Moral Immoral	none		
	Disloyal Loyal	none		
	Unfriendly Friendly	Spanish	Teachers	.001
		Cuban	Teachers	.001
		Arabic	Teachers	.001
		American	Teachers	.01
		Spanish	American	.001
		Cuban	American	.01

1. Significant differences between pairs are shown only when the overall F was significant beyond .05.

2. Exact probabilities have been rounded up; each entry may be read, "p < (value)."

(group mean = 4.11); the *ts* for both comparisons showed $p < .10$. The "unfriendly/friendly" stimulus yielded more dramatic results, primarily because the ESL teachers responded more in the "friendly" direction than any other group. The ESL Teachers' group mean (2.9) was close to the "3" value assigned to an individual response of (Refusing to let someone copy is) "Somewhat Friendly." The native undergraduates' mean response (4.4) fits between the "Somewhat Friendly" and "Generally Unfriendly" categories, while averaged responses of the three nonnative groups fell between "Generally Unfriendly" and "Unfriendly" (means were: Arabic-speakers, 5.1; Cubans, 5.2; and Spanish-speaking students, 5.5). All of the significant pair differences, then, reflected the response differences between the 2 native groups and the 3 nonnative groups.

The results described above, taken together, suggest that all involved saw cheating behavior as essentially wrong and immoral, and that of the 5 groups, the Spanish-speaking ESL students were less conservative than others in their attitudes toward the kinds of cheating behavior portrayed. When the 5 groups are rank-ordered on "conservativeness" for all items, regardless of significance tests (with the responses "wrong" and "immoral" rated as conservative for the situations about using cribnotes, copying, and allowing someone to copy, and the responses "moral," "loyal," and "friendly" rated as conservative for the item regarding refusal to allow copying), the two Hispanic groups appear to be consistently less conservative than the other three groups. Average rankings across all 9 items show the Arabic-speaking ESL students, native students, and ESL Teachers to be most conservative (average ranks were 2.1, 2.4, and 2.4, respectively), and the Cubans (average rank = 3.9) and Spanish-speaking ESL students (average rank = 4.4) to be least conservative. On the whole, then, these results seem to confirm the general impression of ESL teachers that their nonnative

students are more casual about cheating than are native students, at least as regards the Spanish-speakers; this perception appeared to be disconfirmed by responses of the Arabic-speaking students.

Evaluation of subjects' written comments was necessarily informal, since comments were invited but not actively solicited. Response patterns here showed typical bias patterns, that is, the number, length, and complexity of comments declined from the first to last items, suggesting response fatigue; and more comments appeared to have been written by subjects whose responses were extreme rather than qualified. Notwithstanding these reservations, the comment patterns across groups raise important questions about exactly how the statistical results can be interpreted. Only a few such patterns will be described in order to illustrate the problems.

In their comments about using cribnotes, ESL Teachers tended to characterize the person more than the act, using terms like bastardly, sneaky, lazy, stupid, and irresponsible. One teacher labeled the cribnote user (John) "insecure," and another asserted that he needed counseling. Among the native undergraduates' comments, a few echoed the judgment often associated with teachers and parents, namely, that "he's only hurting himself," but a few more claimed John was being unfair to classmates. In fact, native students were the only respondents who referred to the concept of fairness in their comments. Many of the responses of the Cuban and Spanish-speaking groups claimed John (Juan) was "fooling himself," and no other groups used that concept. "Dishonest" was used frequently by all groups, but the Hispanic groups more frequently than others explicitly dissociated dishonesty and immorality. Finally, Arabic-speaking students were the only respondents to invoke issues of property rights, both in objectifying honesty ("honesty is a treasure") and in referring to cribnote use and copying as theft ("he would be stealing information;" "it is a kind of theft"). In general,

comments about the act of copying from another's test paper corresponded to the patterns observed in "using cribnote" comments.

Comments were considerably more qualified in response to the items focusing on the person whose cooperation was necessary for copying to occur. Several ESL teachers labeled "allowing someone to copy" as equally reprehensible as using cribnotes; a few rejected the response categories, remarking, e.g., that "it's neither wrong nor right," and "[it's not] a question of morality." In addition, several teachers commented that they themselves would allow copying "if it's absolutely necessary that he pass the course," "if I felt there were extenuating circumstances," "if he were a member of my family," or "if failing the test were to precipitate calamity for Fred disproportionate to my own unease in aiding and abetting." To the question of refusing to allow copying, a majority of teacher comments rejected "loyalty" and "friendliness" as relevant to the issue.

Responses by the native United States students again included several references to unfairness, and many characterized the "allower" as weak and insecure, as "succumbing to peer pressure," and of being "afraid to lose Fred's friendship." While a few saw "allowing" as positive ("friendly," "caring," "helpful," "he's a real buddy"), most defined the behavior as dishonest but qualified their judgments on the specific situation by describing various circumstances they saw to be relevant. The Cuban and Spanish-speaking-student groups' comments characterized Fred's (Fernando's) behavior in strong negative terms considerably more frequently than either the ESL Teachers or native students, and were the only groups to use the concept of fraud in describing his "allowing" behavior. Members of both groups tended to see allowing copying as reinforcing the copier's bad study habits or his laziness, and consequently as unhelpful in the long run. No one in either Hispanic group mentioned issues of peer pressure or

fear of losing friendship as explanations for allowing copying. Several persons in the Spanish-speaking ESL group—but no one in the Cuban group—saw the "allower" as not responsible for the copier's behavior, commenting, e.g.: "the injured one is him and not me;" "it depends on him;" "I can let a classmate copy if he considers it good for him although I don't think the same;" and "it's not Fernando's problem."

One additional impression about respondents' comments seems worth noting. Considering only the two student groups with a majority of females (Spanish-speaking ESL students and native undergraduates), it appeared that females commented on issues of the relationship between copier and "allower" or "refuser" far more frequently than did males, in both groups. Males, on the other hand, qualified their judgments in terms of circumstances rather than relationships. This observation is consistent with findings and conclusions of Gilligan's (1982) critique of male-derived interpretations of moral choice.

The preceding discussion of subjects' written comments is not intended to provide a foundation for inferences about attitudes toward cheating regarding any of the ethnic groups surveyed. It is intended, rather, to suggest the strong possibility that paper-pencil, limited-response-format instruments typically used for investigating attitudinal differences between groups are even less reliable than otherwise when used with groups of differing cultural origin than they are when used with culturally homogeneous samples. The statistical results of the present study, as noted above, seem to show that Spanish-speaking respondents are considerably more "casual" about "cheating" than are native or Arabic-speaking respondents. We believe, however, that to draw such an inference would be a serious error.

The scale used for this study, like those often used for such investigations, was structured and worded by members of the dominant socioeconomic class (white, middle

class) of the United States. The usual result is that subjects' responses are interpreted in terms of the meanings of the scales' authors; accurate translation of instruments does not by itself alter this effect. This process is innocuous when the inferences drawn from research findings are generalized only to members of the researchers' cultural group. Because of the kinds of cultural meaning differences described above, however, the conclusions of any crosscultural study whose data are derived only from such instruments are at best highly suspect, and at worst, seriously false and misleading.

In connection with the present study, a former ESL student from Colombia was interviewed. He asserted that for his culture cheating is not a moral issue; classified as a venial, not a mortal, sin, it does not even require confession. Competition among students in his culture, he declared, is reserved for a few top students who compete among themselves. For the majority, to hide your paper from a colleague who wants to look at it would be "most uncomfortable and very impolite." Another Spanish-speaking ESL student wrote: "Cheating is . . . a matter of advantages and disadvantages, and you have to be really careful because the risk could be too big to get anything out of it." This student, like others, sees cheating as "against the rules," but discusses it as essentially value-neutral, like whispering or passing notes behind the teacher's back.

The word "cheat" clearly has a different semantic domain in South American cultures as compared to the cultural majority in the United States. To cheat is to do no more than attempt to reach one's own goals while harming no one. To allow someone to copy is not only not cheating, but is seen as helping. In his culture, the Colombian student remarked, a teacher would not punish a helper; helping is not recognized as something wrong. It is not merely that words have different meanings

in different cultures, but also that similar behaviors have different meanings and values.

The first question posed for this study was: "Are nonnative ESL students less 'moral' than native students?" While our numerical data supported the hypothesis of significant attitudinal differences among the groups surveyed, and despite their apparent confirmation of ESL teachers' impressions about nonnative students, we must conclude that the approach we took cannot answer the question. We may conclude from our data that Hispanic students are likely to copy and to allow copying more casually than do native students, but we may not infer from this that Hispanic students are less moral. Morality in this case is our problem, and not theirs. In view of the plentiful data (most of it based on self-report) regarding the frequency of cheating among United States students, it may be that the major difference between students of the two cultures is that native students have spent more time learning to avoid detection.

Another result of our informal interviews with nonnative students raises an important question about the usefulness of intercultural survey results when the instruments—regardless of their psychometric quality or cultural validity—are administered to persons who are not native to the researchers' culture. Our interviewees claimed that success in their United States schooling was extremely important to them, both because of its potential economic value and because of the high social value of a diploma from the United States. Because of the importance of success, it is also important to them that they please their hosts as much as possible. They acknowledged that their responses to the formal questionnaire misrepresented their attitudes somewhat in the conservative direction. To paraphrase Rensberger (1983), we may suggest that student guests from other cultures may be more interested in pleasing their hosts than in contributing to science. "If asked a leading question," Rensberger wrote of the subjects of anthropological field studies, "they consider it rude not to follow the lead" (p. 34).

Conclusions

We began this investigation by posing questions about morality which, it appears, cannot be answered. We can conclude from our data only that there may be culturally based differences in classroom behavior of native and nonnative students, and that such behavioral differences cannot legitimately be judged in terms of the values of the culture within which they occur.

We anticipated that our findings "would help to provide a basis for more accurate description of the challenge of intercultural encounter in the ESL classroom" (above, p. 1). We believe we have accomplished that aim (although not in the manner expected), and can now sketch the implications of our study for the behavior of ESL teachers. We suggest that ESL teachers define the "problem of cheating" as an issue of acceptability rather than of morality. Avoiding the use of culturally-loaded words like "cheating," they can work to describe specifically both the unacceptable behaviors and their associated sanctions. We suggest they can impose the sanctions, when necessary, in the same relatively dispassionate way that they respond to tardiness or homework delinquency. While teachers may not eliminate copying among their students, they will at least, perhaps, facilitate the socialization of nonnative students without unconsciously and unnecessarily imposing their own culture-specific values.

As researchers, we have considered both our own results and various critiques of cross-cultural research on morality and moral development. We believe studies that describe without judging are likely to be useful, and are needed to further our understanding of other cultures as well as our own. However, research that purports to compare the morality of people of several cultures against a presumably universal standard is flawed from its inception, and should, we believe, be discontinued.

We are not optimistic that this recommendation will be heeded in the near future. A decade ago Simpson (1974) attacked comparative studies of moral reasoning

development; yet in 1980 Bar-Yam, Kohlberg, and Naame published their finding that Israeli youth were significantly more "morally mature" than Arab youth, based on the scoring of Kohlberg's moral dilemmas. "Perhaps," the authors concluded, "the greater the degree of social justice, equal rights, and democratic participation in a society, the more stimulating that society can be for the moral development of its members" (p. 361). Extended criticism of patent ethnocentrism, however, is not the purpose of this report. We wish only to alert researchers again to the inescapable risks of investigating morality. As Haan (1982) remarked: "This is our problem: Because our calling is to be unrestrictedly curious about life and morality is fundamental in life, we should investigate morality" (p. 1096). When we do so, we must adopt assumptions and methods that do not distort the very phenomena we seek to understand.

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